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ABSTRACT

The kinds of school choice programs and the processes by which they became legalized in Minnesota are discussed in this paper. The first part reviews reasons for restructuring American schools. The second part describes how the Minnesota education system moved changed in the following areas: from a single delivery system to community education; from K-12 education to lifelong learning; from ad hoc programs to comprehensive programs for at-risk children; from few leaders to school-based management; from inputs to outcome-based education; and from monopoly to choice. The kinds of choice opportunities available in Minnesota are described next--open enrollment, high school graduation incentives, and postsecondary options. The processes by which public support was built for each program and ultimately legislated are also described. (LMI)

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(CHOICE AND ACCOUNTABILITY: THE MINNESOTA EXPERIENCE)

PRESENTATION

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CHOICE AND ACCOUNTABILITY: THE MINNESOTA EXPERIENCE

It's really a pleasure to be here, I can see that Minnesota's loss is Colorado's gain. I was telling Jim earlier tonight that Carl Johnson, who is now a lobbyist for the Minnesota School Board Association, formerly the chair of the House Education Committee in Minnesota, always tells Ole and Lena jokes at the various meetings that he chairs. But recently he said that not only had they retired, they had died. About a year ago he had been chastised for telling Ole and Lena jokes by someone who said that we shouldn't tell racial and ethnic jokes any longer. So he had said, "Well, tonight I am not going to tell a Ole and Lena joke, I am going to tell a joke about Hittites. There were two of them and their names were Ole and Lena.

It's great to be here with all of you from Colorado and with many of my friends around the country. I want to give kudos to the Gates Foundation and all of you associated with the foundation for believing that your resources and your philanthropic efforts should be used for programs to improve and change education.

All of us who are educators are delighted that the interest in education reform and education restructuring continues unabated. Interest in teaching and learning has been helped a great deal by the fact that we have had the involvement of so many people who are not in education. Governors, legislators, foundations, business and industry, the media, Congress and the President of the United States all want to help with the reform and restructuring of education.

Today I am going to talk about choice, one aspect of restructuring the system. But before I do that let's review why we need to restructure the system. Our educational system was great for the industrial age. We did a fine job of educating people to work in industry. They learned a set of facts and procedures, went off to work and made the United Stated the greatest industrial country in the world. But we're in a different age now, the Information Age, and we've got to make changes.

We know that all children and adults must be educated. We must have education for the growth and development of the individual. We've always believed in the individual in the United States. We must have education for citizenship. We've known since the days of Thomas Jefferson that to have a democracy we must educate the masses. It is only since we've moved into the Information Age that many of us talk about economic growth as a purpose of education in our country.

We need to educate all children and adults so they achieve higher levels of learning. Students have to perform. President Bush and the Governors and all of us are talking about higher levels of learning in math and science and communication and geography and history--a whole host of subjects. Different kinds of learning are also necessary. Higher levels of thinking and the learning how to learn skills have not been consistently taught nor have they been taught to all students. How will we do this? By restructuring the educational system. And how is the system restructured?

In Minnesota we have policy an choice, but we also have policy in a number of other areas. Let me briefly show you "from-to" in five of these areas. First, we have moved from the school as a single delivery system to education in the community.

A second way in which we changed in Minnesota to restructure was moving from K-12 to lifelong learning. There are many early education programs. When I discuss the choice programs you'll see opportunities for our students at the upper edge of what we used to call high school.

A third part of restructuring in Minnesota was to move from ad hoc programs to comprehensive policy for children at risk.

Fourth, we have moved from a few leaders to many leaders. School-based management provides opportunities to have many leaders.

A fifth way that we restructured in Minnesota was to move from inputs to outcomes. A large project on outcome-based education is being implemented right now in Minnesota.

The sixth area of restructuring was to move from monopoly to choice.

There are two different forces at work in the educational system: administrative forces and market forces. Typically in education, we've said the way to change the system is to add dollars. We know we have to have dollars. But it may be reallocation of the dollars we already have. There will have to be some additional dollars, but we are not going to get the improvement we want through additional dollars only. We have to have standards. The President and the 50 governors have set national goals, part of

which are standards. State and local educators have set standards over the years. Some standards have been up-graded in recent years. However, it is not only through dollars and standards, the administrative forces, that we have restructuring.

Market forces contrast with administrative forces. Choice will restructure the education system because choice drives the other changes. Choice provides incentives for improvements in schools and school districts.

What are the forces that bring about change? In Minnesota, we believe that incentives and opportunities will bring about change more quickly and that it will be long-lasting as contrasted to mandates. Providing incentives for improvement in schools and school districts is the basic purpose for choice. A second purpose is that choice empowers parents and students. It's the reason the Minnesota Parent Teacher Education Association is so strongly behind choice; they feel parents have been empowered. Choice provides equity in access for 100% of the students.

If you read the national media or op ed pieces or articles in some of the periodicals, someone always raises the issue. The claim is that choice is elitist; a few students move and benefit from the program. What's going to happen to all these students who are left in the district? Choice is for 100% of the students. Every student can move if he or she wants to or if their parents want them to move. Many, many, many parents choose to have their children stay in the district. So all of them (100%) have the option of choice

and of making a decision on where the child should be educated. Choice is for all of the students.

What are the changes? We have only anecdotal information at this time. However, the United States Department of Education is spending three quarters of a million dollars over the next three years to do an evaluation of the choice programs. The Minnesota Department of Education is working with them. It will be very helpful to get the empirical research in addition to the anecdotal information and Minnesota survey research.

Choice provides opportunities for teachers to use their professional expertise. When we talk about diversity of programs we can see how teachers can use their professional expertise in ways that they have not before.

It is very important to understand that the policy on choice is only the beginning. In the implementation of choice parents and students must have consumer information. You and I can choose our significant other, our place of worship, our health care, our entertainment, where we want to shop for groceries, what kind of car we want to buy, and where we want to live. But we wouldn't buy a new house or a car or health care if we didn't have consumer information. We probably wouldn't buy a loaf of bread if we didn't have consumer information. Yet when we talk about choice for students oftentimes consumer information is not discussed. If choice is going to meet the promise that it has, we have to be much, much better at providing information for the consumer. We have to be sure that everybody has the information, that everybody in the low socio-economic strata has it, that everybody in the

middle class, that everybody in the affluent groups has consumer information about choice.

Student/family needs must be determined. Many parents have not thought about, or do not know about, the developmental and educational needs of their child in kindergarten through grade twelve. They have been concerned about early education; we've had choice there. Parents can choose their day care, their children's early learning experiences. And they can choose after age seventeen or eighteen when they choose their post-secondary education. We have that one chunk of time between ages 5-18 where we have somebody other than parents making the decision as to the educational needs of children.

I think there are many parents who do not understand human growth and development. There are many parents who don't understand the differences in the offerings for learning. First of all we have to help parents understand their child. Then determine their expectations for that particular child. The parents also need counseling in making decisions. The counseling doesn't necessarily have to come from someone who has the title counselor. It can come from many of the rest of us. We all have new roles. There are new roles for parents, students, counselors, teachers, principals, superintendents, local boards of education, and the general community.

Let's look at the third point on the triad, diversity of learning environments. Ted Sizer, Dean of the College of Education at Brown University, says that you could go into any high school in

the country and you would probably see the teaching of biology in the same way at 10:00 in the morning day after day. Schools really are not diverse. Schools do not look different. We have choice when buying a loaf of bread, a car or house. A friend of mine recently bought a house; he said that he and his wife looked at 73 houses before they made a decision. There was a lot of diversity for my friend in choosing where he was going to live. We have not yet had a lot of diversity in education.

There are teachers in leadership positions in the Minneapolis Public Schools and the St. Paul Public Schools and the North Branch Public Schools and the Bloomington and Blue Earth Public Schools where changes are being made and the learning environments are diverse. In the Minneapolis Schools you can visit the Chiron School; there is not a single facility where the children meet. They are moving all around the city; the school is no longer the single source for learning. At the Minneapolis Public Academy located in Bethune Elementary School in Minneapolis class size is 1-14 because there are no specialists. The teachers decided that they wanted to work with the children much more closely. In order to have the class size of 1-14, they gave up having special art, music, physical education teachers, social workers and a host of other staff. They received a variance on special education because two of the six teachers were licensed in special education. These are two examples of the kinds of diversity of program options. They're very small yet. But we are developing some models, some beginning demonstrations.

Teachers understand they have autonomy and discretion in site based management; as we have policies that make it possible for them to develop learning environments, we're going to see more diversity of program options. The whole triad is very important because parents first of all have to understand their child, the student. They have to understand the child's needs. They have to have the consumer information. They have to have counseling so they can make wise decisions. There have to be different learning environments to choose.

The three Minnesota choice programs are open enrollment, high school graduation incentives and post-secondary options.

By looking at the enrollment options history you can see choice policy has evolved. The first policy was in 1980 when a Minnesota Statute allowed non-resident student agreements. You can see public policy has been determined by legislators from 1980 through 1988. Presently the Minnesota choice programs are open enrollment, high school graduation incentives, and post-secondary options. Open enrollment began in 1987. In 1987-88 we had 95 districts participate; 137 students chose to move to another district. In 1988-89, 153 districts of the 436 in the state participated; 435 students chose to move to another district. There are 723,000 public school students in Minnesota. Most people who hear about the students who chose to move say, "All this fuss has been made over 137 kids in 1987 and and 435 kids in 1988." That's all there were in those first two years.

The districts had to volunteer to participate in 1987 and 1988. In 1987-88 there was probably a third of the 723,000 students and in 1988-89 it was about two-thirds of the students who had choice. For the school year 1989-90 there were about 3600 students who said they were going to move to another district. In 1989-90, districts with 1,000 or more students had to allow students to leave; in 1990 it will be districts of all sizes.

In the fall of 1989 out of the 297 districts who participated 146 of them both gained and lost students. Seventy-nine districts lost students only. Twenty-six gained students only. In 46 of the districts no one moved anywhere. Even though 100% had choice they didn't choose to move. In 1988-89, 49% went to larger districts; 51% transferred to the smaller districts. When Governor Perpich and I were out working on gaining public support in 1985 you'd have thought that we were suddenly going to have about 20 school districts in the state because so many people thought that all of the small districts would fold up. Actually 2% more of the students went to the small districts; there's a reason. Many times they have smaller class size which parents like. Another interesting statistic is that 63% of the students transferred to richer districts while 37% transferred to poorer districts. The parents didn't look at the tax base. They looked at the programs that were there and what they wanted for their child.

After the first year 89% of the parents when asked had high satisfaction. Do you know any superintendent who wouldn't like to have 89% of the parents satisfied? Some of the parents' statements

follow. "The opportunity to attend a smaller school with an excellent teaching staff and fewer students in a classroom was irresistible." "The benefit in helping meet the individual needs of our kids." The next one is a very common one, particularly with our little children, kindergarten through grade three. "I couldn't see sending my kids eighteen miles one way to school every day versus the eight miles they'll go now." "Going to a larger school offers a lot more in academics." A student said, "My academic abilities have improved greatly. Changing schools is the most important thing I could have done to help my future." We get wonderful testimony!

Transportation is included in the policy in Minnesota. In the post-secondary and the K-12 open enrollment, students with financial need may be reimbursed for transportation costs. We measure financial need based on eligibility for free and reduced price lunch. So any student who is eligible can get paid for transportation from their home school. In K-12 open enrollment, high school graduation incentives, and area learning centers programs the receiving district provides transportation inside the attendance area. The student has to go to the border of the receiving district unless he or she is in financial need as measured by eligibility for free and reduced price lunch. Minor custodial parents and their children can be transported. The babies are transported from home to child care so the mother, and sometimes the father, can attend classes. Under open enrollment policy any eligible student may apply to go to another school. The approval of the resident district is not required. The law states that the district shall

disseminate information to those under 21. The law further states that desegregation may not be violated.

The second choice policy which I'll discuss is the high school graduation incentive program. The reason that this policy became law was that the legislature found the critical need for a high school diploma for every student. They know we can not have "throw-away" children anymore. We have to have everybody educated--at least through high school. Governor Rudy Perpich likes to make this statement, "In Minnesota it costs $24,490 to keep one person in a correctional institution for one year. The most we pay is about $4,000 for any child in public school." The Governor says you could send someone to Harvard or Stanford for a year and give them a summer vacation to Europe for $24,490." In prison over two-thirds of the inmates are drop-outs. Of the people on the human service roles over two-thirds of them are dropouts also. It costs about $12,000 a year for one child and one adult getting assistance. Why shouldn't we make greater efforts to help everyone become a high school graduate? The high school graduation incentives program is that effort. A high school diploma doesn't guarantee a person a job, but it's one of the steps toward it.

Provide incentives for, and encourage, all students to complete their high school work are goals of the Minnesota Governor and Legislature. The President of the United States and the Governors of all states have stated similar goals. The HSGI (High School Graduation Incentives) is for people 12-21. Now some people older than 21, if they meet certain criteria, can participate. Students

eligible to participate in the high school graduation incentives program are those which fit one of these criteria: two grade levels of achievement below other students of the same age, one year below others in credits for graduation, pregnant or a parent, drug or alcohol abuser or truancy.

These students can go to any other public high school, to an approved public alternative education program, an area learning center, a private non-sectarian alternative program, or a post-secondary enrollment option institution. All of these students have wonderful stories after they've changed learning environments. They are marvelous to hear! Everyone of them has a heart-rending testimony!

Who can enroll? Any eligible student according to the criteria in the law. Approval of the resident district is not required. Superintendents and local boards can no longer say, "Yes, you can go," or "No, you can't go." It's now the parent and the student who make that determination. The law also says the district shall disseminate information to those under 21 about this choice program. Desegregation cannot be violated; that's true in any of Minnesota's choice programs. Three districts, Minneapolis Public Schools, Saint Paul Public Schools, and Duluth, are under desegregation rule of the State Board of Education.

Who participated in this program? The Minnesota statute came in 1987. It was implemented in that same year. The first year there were 1400 participants.

In 1987 we passed another law saying that anybody over the age of 21 who didn't have a high school diploma who met certain criteria could earn a high school diploma. Eighteen hundred people who would rather have the high school diploma than the G.E.D. attended classes and earned the diploma. One of our legislators who was 44 years old brought strong support to this bill. Nobody knew that he didn't have a high school diploma. He said it was the first time since he was a very young man that he never talked about the fact that he had never graduated from high school.

How do we deal with the dollars under high school graduation incentives? The resident district reimburses the provider equal to at least 90% of the public school formula allowance. Sixteen schools contract with the public schools and now they get 90% of the public school formula allowance, up from 50% prior to 1989. The Department of Education can collect fees for materials and services. The fees collected must be put back into career options and drop-out prevention programs.

One of the ads we used gives the 800 phone number. This hot line is used a lot. The chief executive officer of a grocery store chain printed the hot line number on a million grocery bags. Tee shirts and other marketing gimmicks were also used.

The third choice program in Minnesota is the post-secondary enrollment options act. The law says that the purpose is to promote rigorous educational pursuits or provide an increased array of courses or programs. It's significant that the law is explicit because some people believe that only the brightest kids should be

able to go to post-secondary institutions. These people do not believe someone who has dropped out of school should be able to go to college under this act. However, that is not what the law says. Dropouts have registered in post-secondary institutions and have done well. It's another way of providing choice to meet individual needs. We have about 55,000 students per grade level. This last year about 5600 juniors and seniors involved so about 5% of those eligible participated.

Students can enroll at a post-secondary institution full- or part-time. Seniors can have three quarters or two semesters, juniors can have six quarters or four semesters.

State aid follows the student. That's dollars again. Institutions determine their own entrance criteria. Macalester College and Concordia College want criteria that's different than Hennepin Technical College; they can determine it and they do. The private colleges keep for the most part the entrance criteria that they have for all students. There's one professor at a private college who won't let any 16-year-old in his philosophy classes because he says they're not mature enough. The University of Minnesota will not let anybody in their Psychology 101 because there's a thousand students in it watching it on television. They say 16-year-olds should not participate in that kind of class. Criteria can be set by courses or for the total institution.

The policy issues include the definition of higher education and the roles of the systems, the provision of counseling to students and parents, state and local responsibility for students not

enrolled in the program, and the assurance of equitable access. In Minnesota we like to say that we have a post-secondary institution within 35 miles of anybody who lives in Minnesota. However we don't have the University of Minnesota (U of M) within 35 miles of everybody nor do we have a state university, so access is a question.

Another policy issue is enabling students to try a post-secondary experience. We've had some young people enroll and then go back to high school. The very first year we had a young man go to the U of M the first quarter, get an A in the class, and then say, "It was great. I liked it, but I want to go back to high school for the next two quarters. I don't want to miss any high school experiences."

Interaction between the systems has increased in competition, awareness of student goals and interests, and quality in both systems. It certainly reduces the financial burden on our families.

In 1987-88 participation was two percent of all eligible juniors and seven percent of eligible seniors--60% were female, 40% were male. Each year enrollment has increased a little.

Thirteen percent went to the technical institutes, 41% to community colleges, 11% to state universities, 30% to the University of Minnesota and five percent to the private schools.

How did the students get their information? Most got it from the high school counselor and teacher. A few got it some other place than the high school. Forty-five percent got it from their

friends. The media helped as 44% indicated they heard about the program there. Parents knew about it in 39% of the cases.

Program satisfaction was high. Over 60% were very satisfied. The very dissatisfied were minimal.

Plans for additional courses were made by many students. There's 80+% who are going to take more. A handful said no, some of them didn't know, some of them said maybe.

The grades they received were also interesting. A good many of them got A's, B's were the highest grade, some got C's, a few D's, a few got E's or F's. The others were incompletes.

Positive outcomes were enormous. We increased the course offerings in every high school in the state without adding costs. We increased the opportunities without mandating any new programs. We increased the options without creating new institutions and we initiated dialogue between systems. Post secondary options is a very successful program!

I want to talk a bit about successes and how we overcame resistance. Choice was not a single issue. Governor Perpich's vision was for a series of restructuring reforms. He spoke about them in a speech entitled, Access to Excellence, given to the Citizen League on January 4, 1985. Choice was one of eight ideas. He got the idea for choice because of a personal experience with his own children, from change agents, from think tank people, and the Minnesota Business Partnerships. Each of these groups were very, very influential in helping to design and develop policy during my tenure as Commissioner of Education and during Governor Perpich's

two terms since 1983. To carry out the vision we needed a plan which was entitled Access to Excellence. Then we put together a marketing plan. As Commissioner, I established a 35-member task force, representatives from every educational group, and the "outside people," that is, the change agents. The task force figured out how to make the governor's idea viable in an educational setting. Some people on the task force were really negative about choice. Others were positive. The work done by the task force over a six-week period of time was written into a bill for the legislature.

A number of coalitions went to work to help move the legislation forward. The design put forth by the task force didn't pass into law in 1985, but ultimately it did. In 1987 the Legislature passed the open enrollment bill in almost the exact way the task force had stated in their report.

Two researchers at the U of M conducted a study of why we were able to pass the post-secondary options. Their research showed you have to have three components. You have to have a catalyst, who was our governor. You have to have coalitions, and they were formed by a whole lot of people. The coalitions included Public School Incentives, People for Better Schools, both non-profit groups, the Citizen's League, the Parent Teacher Association, the Minnesota Association of Secondary School Principals, and a few educators.

Implementation was done through the Minnesota Department of Education. The legislation provided us no additional staff or dollars. The work had to be done in addition to regular

assignments. The Governor went out on the road. Over a period of three months he went to 14 different schools. The governor would give a speech, answer questions, and talk to the local media. We created other events. As Commissioner of Education, I gave speeches; there were debates.

Letters to the editor were written. Op ed pieces were written. The print and the broadcast media were both extremely helpful. The media especially cover events where there's a conflict, and there was a plenty of conflict back in 1985. The president of the Minnesota State Boards of Education and the president of the Minnesota State Education Association and I did dozens of broadcasts and events. I was on one side; they were on the other side. The media played an important role in letting the public know both sides.

In the Legislature there was bipartisan support. This was key to helping the legislation through the process. A Republican carried it in the House, a Democrat in the Senate. They were both very powerful people. The Representative was the majority leader of the House and the Senator was the chair of the Senate Education Appropriations Committee. We did a lot of lobbying with other Legislators and were successful in getting the post-secondary options passed into law. We did not get the open enrollment or the high school graduation incentives in 1985.

Having been successful with post-secondary options we had to determine what we were going to do next? What strategies did we need to develop? In reviewing our work we were concerned about the

acrimony; there had been lots of conflict and terrible division among many people during legislative session. So, in June, 1985, the Governor asked me as Commissioner of Education, to put together a group to determine a vision for education in Minnesota. We brought in representatives of the people who had argued and fought. At first they sat with their arms folded and their lower lips hanging out, glaring at each other. It took a long time but eventually they got over crossing their arms and glaring at each other and their lower lips came back up. The group that started out with 16 people got to be the hottest group in town. Forty-four people representing various organizations wanted to join it. At the end of 18 months we had a plan to present to the Governor. We had negotiated among ourselves; everybody got a little bit of something they wanted in the plan and it included open enrollment. People who didn't like open enrollment didn't lobby that part of the plan but they were neutral during the session. Peace had been created through the Governor's Discussion Group. Participants said to each other: "I know I can trust you."

The Governor continued to provide leadership. He wrote letters to the superintendents about getting involved, saying, "We know you've got a wonderful district, what are you afraid of?" We had front-page coverage in the sports section in regard to athletics and the fear of coaches recruiting. The media, again, were very instrumental in providing information and both sides of the story. Business continued to be involved.

1986 was such a short legislative session--there wasn't any new policy during that session. After 18 months of work we presented the plan to the Governor. He said, "You don't have anything about learners at risk." So we went back to work. A superintendent in the Minnesota Association of School Administrators, an organization which had been very negative wrote the language from which the high school graduation incentives program was born. That part of choice really came from educators, who had been negative.

In 1987 there were a lot of citizens who wanted choice. The first students who had been in the post-secondary options program gave wonderful, positive testimony at the hearings. The legislature then passed the open enrollment bill in late May, 1987; it said that any districts who wanted to volunteer to participate by July 1 could do so. A total of 95 local boards of education voted to volunteer in the program for the fall of 1987. Twenty districts had passed policy about open enrollment prior to this time because the superintendents and local boards believed in it. We were amazed that there were 95 districts who passed the policy during the 41 days after the session. Few children moved to other districts but choice was in place. Parents and students did have the freedom of choice.

There is great promise for choice. It is really very basic. It cannot be equated with school-based management or with other mechanisms. It's as basic as the dollars or as the standards that are set. All other actions flow from them. Choice has the same potential!